



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ March 13, 2014 – March 20, 2015

Mark The Date! VSEA “Fight Back” Rally Being Planned For April 11

VSEA leaders have approved a VSEA “Fight Back” rally on the steps of the State House for Saturday, April 11 at noon. Let’s make our collective voices heard in Montpelier.

“VSEA is in a very important fight right now, and we need as many members as possible to join with us on April 11, so please make plans now to attend,” VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. “Standing strong together, we can help change the budget debate in Montpelier and save the critical public services that so many Vermonters rely upon daily.”

WIA will be feature more on the rally next week, once details become finalized. Members will also be receiving email messages about the rally in the coming days and weeks.

Vermont 911 Dispatchers & Supporters Pack House Chambers To Argue Against Proposed Cut

As one television station put it in a headline, “droves” of VSEA 911 dispatchers, Vermont first responders, VSEA members and other supporters filled the House Chambers in Montpelier on March 17. They were there to deliver testimony to the House and Senate Government Operations Committees, opposing the State’s proposed consolidation of four Public Safety Answering Points (a.k.a. 911 Emergency Dispatch Centers) into just two. The evening began with the unrolling of an eight-foot-wide petition bearing the signatures of more than 3,000 Vermonters asking lawmakers not to approve the consolidation. All three Vermont television networks did live remotes from the hearing, and VPR carried a live stream.

To read more about the hearing and the moving and cautioning testimony delivered by more than a dozen frontline dispatchers, here is some of the press about it on March 18:

FOX44: <http://bit.ly/1EpeCtL>

VTDigger: <http://bit.ly/1DzJJHU>

WCAX: <http://bit.ly/1beo6ku>

WPTZ: <http://bit.ly/18ZqOsi>

Free Press: <http://bfpne.ws/18GJJIx>

Times Argus: <http://bit.ly/18HkPsq>

To see some photos from the hearing, [click here](#).

Dispatchers Light Up The Fifth Floor’s Switchboard Today

According to reports from VSEA’s 911 Dispatchers, the switchboard on the fifth floor, which houses the office of the State’s top official, was lit up most of today by incoming calls from Dispatchers and their supporters, all lobbying against the proposed consolidation of Vermont’s four PSAPs. Workers report the office had to call in additional personnel to help handle the large volume of calls.

Nice job Dispatchers!

Community High School Educators Return To State House To Lobby

Several Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) educators were at the State House on March 18 to continue making their case to lawmakers not to cut funding to the program, which helps rehabilitate and educate so many Vermont offenders. In between bouncing from hearing room to hearing room, the CHSVT educators were invited to address the legislature's Working Vermonters' Caucus, which is a group of about 20 lawmakers who identify themselves as "pro-worker" and supportive of labor and its issues.

CHSVT educator John Vorder Bruegge delivered a powerful defense of the service he and his colleagues provide daily, reminding the Caucus that for every dollar the DOC invests in the CHSVT program, there is a \$4 to \$5 return to Vermonters in the long run. He also asked the Caucus not to focus on the number of diplomas awarded, but rather the large number of "industry certificates" the CHSVT is awarding annually. These certificates, he explained, in areas like welding, automobile repair and other vocations are helping Vermont offenders to find gainful employment after release.

Caucus members thanked the CHSVT educators for the essential service they deliver, and then they took time to explain that this small group of lawmakers does wield the power to join with other lawmakers to oppose any budget presented to them for an up or down vote. They explained that by doing this, they can force more debate on budget proposals deemed detrimental, like the State's desire to deeply cut the CHSVT's funding, privatize the Vets' Home or cut frontline 911 emergency dispatchers.

Legislature's Working Vermonters' Caucus Threatens To Block Budget Vote!

A day after the Working Vermonters' Caucus told CHSVT educators they were considering joining forces with other sympathetic legislators to try to block the State's budget-cutting proposals from being adopted by lawmakers, the Caucus sent an official letter to the House Speaker, warning him of the group's plan.

Here's some of what was reported about the letter [in a March 19 blog post on the *Seven Days: Off Message* site](#):

"In a letter to House Speaker Shap Smith (D-Morristown), 23 members of the Working Vermonters Caucus said they were "unable to support a budget that includes drastic cuts, reductions in work force, and new revenue of only \$35 million. The four-sentence letter was light on details: It did not specify what level of cuts its signatories would accept, nor what taxes they hoped to raise. But according to Rep. Susan Hatch Davis (P-Washington), who co-chairs the caucus, she and her colleagues were united in the belief that 'austerity measures are not working for us.'"

"This is terrific and welcome news," praised VSEA President Shelley Martin. "It's great to see that there are lawmakers who are prepared to stand with VSEA members and Vermonters who are opposed to the current budget proposals on the table.

Retirees Invited To Phone Bank For "Fight Back"

VSEA's Retirees' Chapter is inviting any and all retirees to come to VSEA headquarters on Wednesday, March 25, to participate in a phone bank to support the union's "Fight Back" campaign. The group will be phone banking VSEA members from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., urging them to contact their lawmakers with a "Stop the cuts, VSEA has a better way" message. A lunch is being provided.

If you have any questions, please contact VSEA Retirees' Chapter President Joan Maclay at JMaclay@VSEA.ORG.

AOT NMU Delegate Sends “Fight Back” Message To His Colleagues

VSEA’s elected AOT delegate to the NMU Bargaining Team is Art Aulis; a 25-year AOT veteran who works in Derby. This week Art began distributing a personal message to his colleagues in garages across Vermont about the need for them to engage in VSEA’s “Fight Back” campaign. VSEA thanks Art for being proactive and for taking the initiative to rally the troops. Here’s a short excerpt from Art’s message:

Recognize that we need to stand 100% united at this historic moment. All members should be as engaged as they can with our union. To balance the budget through a targeted tax on state workers is as immoral as balancing the budget by gutting public services. The only true answer is to fund our state by taxing the rich. We must stand united in our continuing efforts to make the [State] and legislators understand this basic fact. For now, we fight on and must fight for our family, our union power, and ourselves. We will not accept pay cuts; we will not support job losses, or the erosion of our power. We know the work we do is important to Vermont’s working families and we know it is only the rich who should be asked to give more. In brief, no pay cuts, no capitulation. We must fight!

To read Art’s entire message, please [click here](#).

Brattleboro Chapter President Pens Powerful “Fight Back” Letter To Local Paper

On March 18, *The Commons* publication in Windham County published a powerful letter to the editor submitted by VSEA Brattleboro Chapter President Robin Rieske.

Here’s an excerpt:

“State employees are not the ones refusing to be reasonable. In fact, history shows that we are the ones who have been reasonable in the past, voluntarily giving up 3 percent in income and step raises to balance the budget...

State employees did not create this budget fiasco. Vermont State Employees’ Association (VSEA), the state workers’ union, bargained with [the State] in good faith, and that binding contract should be honored with as much integrity as the [State] is honoring [its] private contracts. State employees took on a heavy burden when balancing the budget in the past, and it is not our turn to do it again.”

To read Robin’s full letter, and read another Vermonter’s pro-state-employee letter published in the March 18 *Times Argus*, please [click here](#).

Windsor Prison Closing Would Be Felt Across Vermont

When the State recently learned of a new \$18 million hole in the budget, it quickly patched together a laundry list of more cuts to public services; one being the closure of the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor. The idea is being panned by VSEA Corrections Unit members, who, like many prisoners’ rights advocates, know the alternative is to ship more Vermont inmates to private, out-of-state, for-profit prisons where the rehabilitation and education services are nowhere near what offered in Vermont. They also believe the move is short-sighted and doesn’t take the long-term ramifications into consideration, which will result in the savings being gone quickly and in Vermont taxpayers paying more in the long run. Thankfully, in a March 18 [VTDigger piece](#), DOC Commissioner Andy Pallito cautions against thinking the Windsor closure is a done deal, telling lawmakers that the proposal is still in an early phase, adding, “There are many moving parts at this point.”

The [Stowe Reporter published a piece on March 19](#) that highlights the damage Windsor’s closing would have on local businesses and charitable organizations across Vermont. According to the story, if the prison closes, Salvation Farms in Morrystown will lose access to prison labor it uses to prepare vegetables to help feed Vermont’s hungry. The arrangement was working so well, Salvation Farms just made a \$156,000 investment to “renovate a prison building to increase the output.”

“For a small organization of 1.75 employees, it’s taken a lot of energy and determination, and it would be unfortunate to lose this,” Theresa Snow, Salvation Farms’ founder and executive director tells the paper. “It has substantial program implications for us, as we try to build the Vermont Commodity Program.”

The paper also quotes Deb Krempecke, director of Lamoille Community Food Share, who has been receiving fresh produce from Salvation Farms since 2005, and has watched the program grow, despite its low overhead. She tells the paper she is “really upset” to hear that the prison could be on the chopping block.

VSEA Fight Back Campaign Phase II Meetings Continue

VSEA leaders and organizers continue to host worksite meetings across Vermont to educate members about phase two of the VSEA’s “Fight Back” campaign and how members can engage and join your union’s campaign to stop the cuts to services and jobs.

Here are where Fight Back meetings are scheduled for next week (if time not listed, the FB presentation slot is TBD):

March 24

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update
Disability Determination Services
93 Pilgrim Park Road, Suite 6
Waterbury
11:30 a.m.

March 24

Steward Training 1: Introduction To Basics
Vtrans Training Center
1716 Rte. 302
Berlin

March 26

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update
Open Hours, Brown Bag
Bennington State Office Building
ESD Conference Room
Bennington

March 27

Advanced Steward Training: Investigations & Working With DHR
Vtrans Training Center
1716 Rte. 302
Berlin

March 27

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update
NMU Bargaining Team Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier

“One Vermont” Coalition Sends Letter To State, Offering Alternatives To Cuts!

This week, the coalition One Vermont sent a letter to the Speaker and Pro Tem, urging them to abandon the heavy cuts approach to the budget and to explore revenue alternatives. One Vermont bills itself as “a coalition of citizens, organizations, and businesses committed to state policies, programs, and public structures that help build a society that works for all Vermonters.” It includes groups like Public Assets Institute, Vermont NEA, Voices for Vermont’s Children, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility and others. Here’s an excerpt:

One structural budget problem the state faces is that its overall tax system is regressive. While Vermont does have a progressive income tax, which is projected to perform better than the other major General Fund taxes next year as it has in the past, the wealthiest Vermonters still contribute a smaller share of their income overall to pay for schools, roads, prisons, and child protection services than do middle- and lower-income Vermonters. That becomes a greater problem for revenue growth as more and more of the income of the state goes to those at the top, which has been the trend in Vermont, and the rest of the country, for more than 30 years.

Refrain from making additional cuts to state services.

Cuts over the past decade or more have already undermined the state’s ability to competently deliver the services that Vermonters need and want. The failure to raise sufficient General Fund revenue to support these services has shifted costs onto the property tax and pushed up health insurance premiums. The recession has driven up demand for public services, and much of that demand continues. Nevertheless, for everything but health care-related services, the governor has proposed to spend less in fiscal 2016 than the state spent in inflation-adjusted dollars in fiscal 2010.

Note: The VSEA Board of Trustees voted this week to add VSEA’s name to the list of groups participating in One Vermont.

Central Vermont Chapter Meets Tuesday, March 24!

VSEA’s Central Vermont Chapter is meeting Tuesday, March 24, at VSEA headquarters in Montpelier, beginning at 5:00 p.m. This is an important meeting because the Chapter will be conducting officer elections. Pizza is being provided!

Got Questions? Contact Your Elected VSEA Leaders

As the debate around the State’s budget proposal rages on at the State House, VSEA understands that members might have questions about your union’s position on certain issues, or you might want to learn more about how to support a VSEA campaign at your worksite. To help facilitate the conversation, VSEA is pleased to share the following VSEA leaders contact information links with members. They are:

[VSEA Board of Trustees Members](#)

[VSEA Bargaining Unit Teams](#)

[VSEA Council Members](#)

[Chapter Presidents](#)

Deadline Is May 31 To Apply For 2015 Vermont State Colleges Staff Federation Scholarship!

A Vermont State Colleges' Staff Federation scholarship is intended to help VSEA members and their spouses, dependents or domestic partners who are seeking financial assistance to pursue post-secondary educational goals at one of the following: Castleton State College, Lyndon State College, Johnson State College or Vermont Technical College. The deadline to apply is May 31, 2015.

VSCSF scholarship applications should be sent to:

Monique Prive, Librarian
c/o Lyndon State College
P.O. Box 919

Lyndonville, VT 05851-0919

If you want an application or have questions, contact Monique by phone at 802-626-6364 or email her at monique.prive@lyndonstate.edu.

Download an application by [clicking here](#).

Note: The VSCSF scholarship is not to be confused with the annual VSEA scholarship.

VSEA Reminds Chapters To Collect Rebates

VSEA Fiscal Coordinator Amy Haskins asked *WIA* to remind the following VSEA Chapter officers to request their annual Chapter rebates:

- Addison
- Barre
- Brattleboro
- Central VT
- Chittenden
- Franklin/GI
- Lamoille
- Newport/IP
- Springfield
- Waterbury

The deadline to submit your rebate request is May 1, 2015. If you have any questions please contact Amy by email at Ahaskins@vsea.org

AOT Members...Have You Completed Your Bargaining Survey?

VSEA's AOT delegate to the NMU Bargaining Team, Art Aulis, is reminding all AOT workers to complete and submit your bargaining survey, which can be found online by [clicking here](#).

"Your survey responses will help me prioritize the issues most important to AOT rank-and-file workers," explains Aulis. "I'm hoping to hear back from as many of you as possible."

If you have questions, or input, please contact Art, who works out of the Derby garage, at (802) 673-8014 or by email at aaulis@comcast.net.

You can also send communiqués directly to the full NMU Bargaining Team by emailing NBargaining@vsea.org.

NMU Bargaining Team's Survey Now Live!

VSEA's Non-Management Unit Bargaining Team sent a letter and survey link to NMU members last week. The survey seeks to assess NMU members' bargaining priorities before entering into formal negotiations this fall with the State. The NMU's 46-question survey is comprehensive, covering everything from wages to benefits to working conditions.

NMU Chair Bob Stone is stressing the importance of the survey and is urging as many NMU members as possible to fill it out and send it in.

NMU members can [link to the survey here](#). The Team is requesting that surveys be completed by April 15, 2015.

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

March 24

Corrections Unit Bargaining Team Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
8:00 a.m.

March 24

Steward Training 1: Introduction To Basics
Vtrans Training Center
1716 Rte. 302
Berlin
9:00 a.m.

March 24

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting
Disability Determination Services
93 Pilgrim Park Road, Suite 6
Waterbury
11:30 a.m.

March 24

Central Vermont Chapter Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
5:00 p.m.

March 25

Retirees' Chapter "Fight Back" Phone Bank
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
10:00 a.m.

March 26

Advanced Steward Training: Investigations & Working With DHR
Vtrans Training Center
1716 Rte. 302
Berlin
9:00 a.m.

March 26

Open Hours, Brown Bag
Bennington State Office Building
ESD Conference Room
Bennington
11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Includes Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update

March 27

NMU Bargaining Team Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
8:30 a.m.

Includes Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update